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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 002768

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MCAP](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MNUC](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: MISSILE DEFENSE: POSITIVE REACTION TO PUTIN'S  
OFFER

REF: MOSCOW 2659

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel A. Russell. Reasons: 1.  
4(B/D).

11. (C) Summary: Putin's offer to collaborate with the U.S. in Missile Defense at the Qabala radar site in Azerbaijan has been hailed by Russian officials and most commentators. Most argue that Moscow's offer of cooperation should be taken at face value and seriously. By proffering Russian cooperation, Putin has decisively aligned Russia against the threat posed by Iran, continuing a GOR trend toward tougher relations with Ahmadinejad. End Summary.

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POSITIVE STEP FORWARD  
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12. (SBU) GOR officials were quick to form a chorus of support for Putin's offer on MD cooperation, characterizing it as an effective response to U.S. plans that would also serve Russian security interests. First Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov argued that joint use of the Qabala radar station would solve "real problems" in the security area and counter "contemporary challenges and threats." Putin's Foreign Policy Advisor Sergey Prikhodko stressed that talks with the U.S. on the proposal at the deputy minister-level were expected soon and that Russia was ready for the "deepest possible, far reaching and honest cooperation." Russian First Deputy Defense Minister General Aleksandr Belousov claimed the Qabala radar was uniquely positioned to protect Europe and Russia from attacks from Iran and other countries.

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CALLING THE U.S. "BLUFF"?  
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13. (C) Official commentary and experts we spoke to overwhelmingly saw Putin's proposal as putting the burden squarely on the U.S. to prove that its MD plans were not actually directed at Russian capabilities, but were targeted against threats from Iran or the DPRK. Duma Deputy and former Major General Nikolay Bezborodov argued that if U.S. statements that MD was not aimed at Russia were true, then the U.S. would accept Putin's proposal because the south-facing Qabala radar covered the area of concern to the U.S. Fedor Lukyanov, a liberal analyst and Editor of "Russia in Global Politics," labeled the Putin proposal a "master stroke" of Russian diplomacy. He stressed that it made the point effectively that Russia was not against a MD system that defended Europe, but was opposed to an MD system that could threaten Russia's strategic capabilities. He viewed the proposal as aimed at least as much at European audiences as at the U.S. Ivan Safranchuk, of the Moscow office of the World Security Institute, echoed this view, and warned us that if this "constructive" proposal was ignored, many Russians would be convinced that MD elements in Europe were strictly intended to counter Russian strategic forces.

REMOVING THE THREAT TO RUSSIA

14. (C) Some officials and experts explicitly conditioned use of the Azerbaijani facilities on non-deployment of U.S. MD in Poland and the Czech Republic. General Belousov argued that use of Qabala made it possible for the U.S. to abandon plans for a third MD site in Central Europe. Former Chief of the Strategic Rocket Forces Col.-General Viktor Yesin from the hardline Academy of Security, Defense and Law and Order supported this view and stressed that acceptance of a conditioned proposal would remove Russia's concerns about the U.S. and U.S. concerns about the Iranian threat. Kremlin-linked analyst Vyacheslav Nikonov saw a potential tug of war, with the U.S. trying to integrate the Qabala site into its plans for a third site in Central Europe and Putin pushing back against that idea.

RUSSIA WANTS COOPERATION

15. (C) While pundits agreed that the proposal was aimed at addressing Russian fears about U.S. plans, a common theme was that the proposal demonstrated that Russia had now decided to pursue cooperation with the U.S. on MD after dismissing earlier U.S. offers. Aleksandr Belkin of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy (CFDP) emphasized to us that Putin's offer, if seriously considered by the U.S., could bring Russia back into the fold of MD cooperation. The U.S. should at least see where this offer went. It could be, he said, a genuine offer with practical MD applications. Aleksandr Konovalov, President of the Institute of Strategic Assessments, told us that the proposal, if accepted, would be

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a tremendous confidence-building measure that indicated Russia's clear interest in taking part in MD cooperation, if on Russian terms.

RUSSIAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS

16. (C) Few experts were willing to address the dissonance between GOR arguments that Iran now posed a potential missile threat to Europe and Russia and claims made only days before that Tehran did not pose any real challenge. Lukyanov acknowledged that Iran would be more than irritated by the proposal, but said that this reflected Russia's slow but steady pulling away from Tehran, which had begun when Russia signed on last year to the first round of sanctions. Iran had disappointed Russia too frequently and the GOR had now made a strategic decision to side with the U.S. and Europe in the dispute about Iran's nuclear intentions and regional ambitions.

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